The Episcopal Diocese *of* Vermont

Policy for Celebrating and Blessing a Marriage (2025)

Preparing couples for lifelong relationships is an important pastoral responsibility. Care should be taken to ensure adequate time for preparation. In situations in which there has been a previous marriage (or civil union), adequate time should be allowed to comply with all diocesan policies. These guidelines are meant to serve as general guidelines for the clergy and congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. Clergy and local congregations may wish to develop additional guidelines and policies to assist couples seeking the church's pastoral support and blessing on their lives together. If you have any questions about these policies or procedures, please call the Bishop's Office early in the process.

General Provisions for Celebrating and Blessing a Marriage

The policy, guidelines, and provisions in this document apply to all couples seeking marriage in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. As agents of the State of Vermont, clergy have permission to preside at the marriages of any couple who obtain a marriage license from the State of Vermont and to preside at the liturgical celebration and blessing of those marriages. Whenever a priest presides at any wedding, in any venue, and under any circumstance, the priest does so as an ordained minister. In addition:

1. At least one of the persons must be a baptized person, involved in the life of the Church.
2. Thorough preparation is required and should include conversation about the Christian understanding of marriage, money, communication, relationship roles, sexual relations, family, any minor children, and finally, planning the liturgy.
3. A Declaration of Intention, signed by both parties, is required. The Declaration is to be kept in the files of the local congregation where the marriage is registered. Through use of this Declaration, couples will be reminded that the Church expects that "such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." (Resolution D039, General Convention 2000)
4. Couples are required to have a marriage license for clergy to officiate at a liturgy of Celebrating and Blessing a Marriage.
5. Liturgies or liturgical outlines authorized by The Episcopal Church and/or the Bishop of Vermont are to be used for Celebrating and Blessing a Marriage.

Pastoral Care for Persons Who Have Previously Been in a Marriage or Civil Union

In addition to the above, any priest officiating at the marriage of anyone who has been divorced (or whose Civil Union has been dissolved), must obtain the bishop's consent to officiate at the marriage.

The forms to request *Consent to Remarriage* can be found on the diocesan website under "Resources for Leaders/For Clergy/Marriage Resources" or by contacting the Canon to the Ordinary for Missional Vitality and must be submitted to the bishop *at least 60 days before the proposed date of the marriage* by the officiating clergyperson.

The application for *Consent to Remarriage* should include a statement of the counseling sessions and the specifics of the care of any minor children.

1. A photocopy of the divorce decree(s) and/or civil union dissolution(s) must be in the cleric's files and the cleric should assure the bishop of this when submitting a request to officiate.
2. The preparation required should also include conversation about why the first marriage or civil union was dissolved and how the new relationship is different.

Consent will not be normally granted for third or subsequent marriages or unions except for the most extenuating circumstances and then only with evidence of substantial counseling from a therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist who will provide a letter to the bishop stating that the person has worked through personal issues surrounding broken relationships. In such circumstances, the following items are to be included in the application:

a. The letter from the therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist;
b. Copy of the divorce or dissolution decrees;
c. Specifics of care of minor children (visitation, financial arrangements, and blended family incorporation issues).

Other Provisions

These policies apply to all Episcopal clergy officiating at Marriage Rites in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. Clergy who are not canonically resident or licensed to officiate in the Diocese of Vermont are:

1. required to obtain permission of the bishop to officiate at Marriage Rites in the Diocese of Vermont; and
2. required, by law, to obtain the necessary civil authorization from the State of Vermont.

Clergy and congregations are encouraged to develop any fee, building use, pastoral or other policies appropriate to the local ministry setting. Consistent with the provisions of I.18.4 of the Canons of the Episcopal Church, it shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage.

Policy authorized by Bishop and Executive Council 2025